



REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT C. “BOBBY” SCOTT  
3<sup>RD</sup> DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

June 5, 2001



## An Important Message from Congressman Scott...

Dear Pastor:

I would like to share with you my concerns about President Bush's Faith-Based Initiative. First, I would like to say that there is broad support for funding faith-based and community based programs in general. While President Bush's intentions are laudable, his inclusion of "Charitable Choice" in his proposal is unfortunate. Although it is described as a plan to help religious organizations receive and administer government grants, Charitable Choice in practice represents a fundamental assault on our civil rights laws.

Religious organizations have always been at the forefront of addressing this country's most pressing social problems. They provide food to the hungry and shelter for the homeless. They have a long history of speaking out on social justice issues, from slavery in the 1800's to civil rights in the 1900's. Today, faith-based organizations do these things not out of duty, or because a government grant compels them to, but because they have a fundamental mission to help others.

The President wants government to capitalize on these good works by expanding involvement of faith-based organizations in federal programs. Under traditional laws, many religious organizations already sponsor Federal programs. They are funded like all other private organizations are funded: they are prohibited from using taxpayer money to advance their religious beliefs and they are subject to civil rights laws. There is no controversy regarding this, and many religiously affiliated organizations, such as Catholic Charities and Lutheran Services of America, receive substantial federal funding under traditional laws.

Unfortunately, the Administration has failed to inform the public that it is proposing to include the new, controversial provision called Charitable Choice as part of its Faith Based Initiative. **Charitable Choice specifically allows sponsors of federally funded programs to discriminate in employment on the basis of religion (and possibly even race) for the first time in 60 years.**

Some of us are frankly shocked that we would even be having a debate about whether basic civil rights laws should apply to sponsors of federally funded programs. We remember that when the civil rights laws passed in the 1960s, the vote was not

unanimous. Publicly funded employment discrimination was wrong in the 1960s, and it is still wrong.

Supporters of Charitable Choice have promised to invest needed resources in our inner cities, but have failed to explain why the repeal of fundamental civil rights laws must be part of that investment. It is insulting to suggest that we cannot get those investments, unless we turn the clock back on our civil rights.

There are other issues involving the faith based initiative that warrant concern, such as the church/state constitutional issues, the loss of independence if the church becomes dependent on government funds, and the legal implications of the federal government auditing church finances. Even if those issues are resolved, however, we should never consider any Charitable Choice legislation which allows employment discrimination with federal funds.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Should you have any questions or need background materials, please do not hesitate to contact my Washington office at 202/225-8351.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bobby Scott", written in a cursive style.

Representative Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
Third Congressional District of Virginia

[Click here for a list of organizations belonging to The Coalition Against Religious Discrimination](#)